

NOTES FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN THE BOOK OF I THESSALONIANS - CHAPTER FOUR

CHAPTER FOUR continues to examine the essentials of effective Christian ministry. This time the theme could be described as 'Ministry to the Max'. The key word is 'excel' (4:1,10) which is the word we have already seen in chapter 3, 'perisso', meaning 'abound' or 'excel' and implies an ongoing process of quality improvement towards the best. There are three ways in which we are to excel.

1. Excel in our walk which will please God.(4:1-8)

- the will of God is about sanctification, being, rather than doing. Sanctification is from the same word as saint or holy, and means 'set apart for the exclusive use of the owner'. So often we have been taught to seek the will of God in the sense of a programme for our lives. When we truly belong to Him all that follows readily. In the next chapter Paul tells us how to be in His will.(5:16-22)

- sexual morality and so faithfulness within marriage is used as an example. 'Vessel' used for 'body' reminds us that our bodies are the vessels which contain the treasure of Christ.(II Cor.4:7)

- sanctification is linked with 'honour' towards our wife or husband, valuing them, giving them first place, 'not in lustful passion', treating them as people not things.

- not defrauding our brother (or sister). Defrauding means 'to have more' which explains the motive behind the action of unfaithfulness. Such actions defraud not only the partner but the children of that marriage who will suffer innocently for years to come.

- rejecting these principles and our wife or husband is rejecting God

2. Excel in our love for our fellow Christians.(4:9-12)

- it is a commitment which can only be taught by God not by man.(v.9) In other words it is useless to tell someone else to love more.

- it begins with those in our own family and area and then reaches out to the whole country.(v.10)

- it is about minding our own business not interfering in other people's lives.(v.11)

We have so often assumed that Christian love allows us to try to change other people's behaviour or use of time or money. Real love recognises that change is God's business as He is allowed to grow in others.

- it involves hard work, the 'labour of love' of 1:3.(v.11)

- it will be behaving 'properly'; 'euschemonos' means 'comely' or 'having a beautiful appearance'.(v.12) There is something immensely attractive about real Christian love.

- it will not leave people in need.(v.12)

3. Excel in hope.(4:13-18)

- means that we do not have to grieve for the dead.

- means that because Jesus rose from the dead, we can know that we will also.

- means that when He returns those alive and those 'asleep' will join Him for ever.

- means that we can comfort (=strengthen) one another by the certainty of His return, a fact of history. We know that everything on earth began with creation as in Gen.1 and 2. But equally we can have a certainty about how it will end though we will not know when.

It is like knowing the final score at the beginning of a game. The action on the field may be tough but none of that matters when victory is assured.

QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER FIVE

5:1,2 Q.1 What indication will we have that the Lord is about to return? What should be our response when people predict a time and a place for the return of Jesus?(Matt.24:4,5,36) What totally different kind of message will non-Christian leaders be giving when the Lord is about to return?

5:3-11 Q.2 Why should the Lord's return not be a cause of fear for Christians? What is the most important thing for us to do to be prepared? What equipment has God given us to make us secure for that time? How can we be sure we will go to heaven when Christ returns? How are we to help each other to be sure?

5:12,13 Q.3 What are Christian leaders meant to be doing for us? How are we to respond to them? Are we to obey any instruction they give us? What problems commonly arise in leadership which would be avoided if we followed Paul's advice here?

5:14,15 Q.4 What four instructions are given to all believers in verse 14? What difference would it make in the church if we did all four? How would this help us to 'live in peace with one another'? How should we respond when conflict does arise between us? How does this work in practice?

5:16-22 Q.5 List the eight further instructions in this section. How do they form a sequence for those wanting to learn how to live the Christian life? What do the first three have in common? How does verse 18 help to explain I Thess.4:3? What quenches the Holy Spirit? Does not despising prophetic utterances mean that we should believe everyone who claims to have a prophecy?(Deut.13:1-5)

5:23-28 Q.6 What three parts does every human being have? How does God work in all three? What is His objective? How is verse 24 an encouragement to us? What three further instructions does Paul give? What is the connection between them? How does the final verse sum up the message of the whole book?